

Planning for Intensifying Suburbs: Analyzing Markham and Vaughan

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Abstract

In the North American context suburbs are where the majority of the population resides, as they attract families of all types, provide a variety of housing typologies as well as play critical roles in the economy and fixation of local governments. Though this development trend has been in strong demand for years, cities have become increasingly aware of the negative costs associated with sprawl, which has lead the government of Ontario to adopt smart growth principles. Since this time the government has made significant steps in order to curb sprawl, through the Places to Grow Act as well as the Greenbelt Act, where large masses of land and protected and growth is designated to certain highlighted growth centres.

Both Markham Centre as well as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre are part of Ontario's growth centres as outlined in the Places to Grow Act. Analyzing literature on suburban intensification as well as plans and policies which have lead to the development of Markham Centre, this paper attempts to answer what the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will become. The City of Vaughan is primarily a place of low density while also being automobile reliant, therefore the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre represents something completely different than the current landscape and does not belong to an existing area or neighbourhood.

Using literature on suburban intensification as well as Markham Centre as an example of having good planning principles, the specific question put toward the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre in this Major Paper will ask if Vaughan's downtown can be regarded as suitable and appropriate growth?

Foreword

This Major Paper is the conclusion of my Area of Concentration, Planning High-Rise Developments in Suburban Regions, which is outlined in my Plan of Study. This Area of Concentration sought to explore topics on intensification in suburbs, while analyzing how these changes are implemented in different places undergoing significant change. Furthermore I also sought to understand who the different actors are in intensifying the suburbs, as well as the different roles these various actors played.

The three components to my Area of Concentration in my Plan of Study as well as learning objectives consist of urban planning, suburb and urban politics. The intention behind these components as well as set learning objectives sought to give me an understanding of the planning profession whilst obtaining knowledge on past planning initiatives in suburbs through analyzing the change on the built environment. Furthermore I aspired to gain knowledge on the degree to which politics influenced planning or vice versa in the process of place making and development. These learning objectives were fulfilled throughout the Masters in Environmental Studies program through various courses, a workshop, as well as my field experience. The specific components and learning objectives fulfilled in this paper include:

Component 1: Urban Planning

Learning objective 1.2 – Develop a clear understanding on the planning process, in order to acquire the skills to practice planning.

Component 2: Suburb

Learning objective 2.1 – To obtain knowledge on past and current intensification plans in suburbs around North America, in order to assess different impacts on the built environment.

Component 3: Urban Politics

Learning objective 3.1 – To gain knowledge on the degree to which politics influences planning or vice versa in the process of place making and development.

Learning objective 3.3- To gain knowledge on how policies created for the purpose of intensification, housing control, and mortgage lending affects the planning process if at all.

This Major Paper finalizes my Area of Concentration by analyzing intensification in Markham, Ontario as well as the planned intensification in Vaughan, Ontario. Through this essay I analyse various works of literature, policy as well as site visits in order to establish what the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will be capable of.

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Contents

Abstract	ii
Foreword	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction	12
Methodology	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review	16
Suburbs	16
Suburban and Urban Lifestyles	19
Sprawl	20
Politics of Sprawl	21
Actors in the Intensification of Suburbs	22
Smart Growth and Intensification	23
Opinions of Planners, Municipal Councilors, and Developers	25
Chapter 3: York Region Official Plan 2010.....	27
Overview	27
City Building.....	28
Intensification	29
Chapter 4: City of Markham	31
Context.....	31
Markham in Literature	32
Diversity in Markham	33
Opinions of Planners, Elected Officials and Developers	34
Markham Official Plan	35
Framework for Sustainable Growth	35
Intensification	36
Healthy Neighbourhoods and Communities	36
Housing	36
Urban Design and Sustainable Development.....	37
Transportation	37
Land Use	38
Residential.....	38

Area and Site Specific Policies	39
Markham Centre	39
Markham Centre Background.....	39
Markham Centre Site Visits.....	41
Unionville	41
Downtown Markham	42
Chapter 5: City of Vaughan	44
Background.....	44
Vaughan Official Plan.....	44
Extensive Engagement Exercise	44
The Vision for Transformation: Goals for the Official Plan.....	45
Building a Great City	46
Woodbridge Avenue	47
Woodbridge Avenue Streetscape and Design Guidelines.....	48
Woodbridge Avenue Guiding Principles	48
Woodbridge Avenue Site Visit	49
The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre	52
Background	52
Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan.....	53
Vision and Principles	53
Objectives	54
Streets and Transportation	54
Parks and Open Spaces	55
Community Services, Cultural Facilities and Public Art	55
Niagara University of Ontario.....	56
PricewaterhouseCoopers-YMCA.....	56
Land Use, Density and Built Form	57
Station Precinct	57
South Precinct	57
Neighbourhood Precincts.....	57
East and West Employment Precincts	58
Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Site Visit.....	58

Interview: City of Vaughan – Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Vision	60
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	64

Chapter 1: Introduction

Development following World War II in Canada and North America came largely in the form of suburbs, which in this context are regarded as spread out low-rise residential enclaves housing the majority of the middle class who are often thought of as having a consumerist mindset. Though there is not one single factor for the massive adoption of suburban development, large attributes exist in the form of the desire for home ownership, access to large parcels of cheap land, financing available through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation as well as wide-ranging municipal zoning bylaws.

In the past two decades development trends have shifted in Ontario in favor of smart growth policies, which favor sustainable development, the protection of the natural environment as well as increasing options in terms of housing and transportation. This trend in development was further solidified as an outcome of the Oak Ridges Moraine dispute in the early 2000's where the government banned all developments within this area which was highly targeted by the private industry. The Oak Ridges Moraine led to the eventual adoption of the Greenbelt Act (2005) as well as the Places to Grow Act (2005).

The Greenbelt Act remains very significant in Ontario, as about 1.8 million acres of land remain protected. Therefore this sets up the Places to Grow Act to designate specific areas for growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Two of the growth centres in the Province of Ontario are Markham Centre as well as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, which both reside in York Region. As Markham Centre has developed with high regards so far, by way of literature and awards in planning, and Vaughan is still in the early stages of development, my paper will analyze the process in Markham as it is relevant to Vaughan in terms of the close geographical location and shared services.

My interest with the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre stems as I have lived in the City of Vaughan for over 20 years and have witnessed a great deal of traditional suburban development throughout my life, and have also witnessed in the past 10 years or so development which follows the principles of smart growth. As the newer developments of townhomes and mid-rise buildings were taking place along main streets and corridors I was interested at how fast the area was changing and beginning to allow for easier access to transportation options and walking. My

interest reached its peak when the new Vaughan Downtown was announced and photos showed an area I could not imagine existing in Vaughan, as the newer forms of housing were happening little by little and integrating with the existing area, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre embarked on an area which has no existing neighborhood or population while setting really large goals. Already being interested in development, urban planning and built form while living in Vaughan when these plans were being actualized, it seemed like the perfect topic to concentrate on in the Masters of Environmental Studies Program.



Figure 1: Traditional Development in Vaughan vs. Planned Downtown. Source: Building.ca (Top), Condonow.com (Bottom)

Examining intensification in York Region, my specific question asks if Vaughan's development of a new downtown City core can be regarded as suitable growth in terms of having the right planning principles in place to achieve the desired goals of the government, developers, and citizens in building a good quality downtown core with good urban form, and infrastructure to support the desired population. As Vaughan's current housing tenure exists predominantly with single use low-rise units, and a population which heavily favors the use of the car, it will be interesting to see how the City as well as developers, and citizens view the desired future of the area. The argument guiding my inquiry will be that Markham, which is also located in York Region, exemplifies good planning and growth principles according to multiple scholarly sources, media outlets, as well as their recent Downtown Markham Master Plan BILD Award in the Best New Community (Built) category at the 2017 BILD Awards. Therefore I can compare what Markham has done in contrast to Vaughan under the same provincial and regional guidelines and determine whether or not Vaughan can accomplish similar end goals. Specific questions to keep in mind throughout this paper include:

- Will the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre be a place for the residents of Vaughan (similar to Woodbridge Avenue which is regarded as the contemporary unofficial downtown or on a greater scale)? Or will it be a unique place of its own?
- Is this plan appropriate for the City of Vaughan? What opportunities does it allow? What obstacles must be overcome?
- Will it work as a centre where people can live, work, play, and have access to various forms of amenities and entertainment? Or will this development be a place where people simply live while using transportation means provided to get to Toronto?
- What evidently works in Markham which can be envisioned for Vaughan's future?
- Who are the actors involved in this project and what models do they use? Furthermore what aspirations do they have?

Methodology

Using a qualitative approach this paper addresses the questions presented above. This is done through a literature review which analyzes scholarly work on suburbs, sprawl, smart

growth and intensification, while at the same time recognizing the various factors involved in these processes. In addition a policy review is also done in order to analyze government documents from York Region, Markham and Vaughan. Furthermore I include a semi-structured interview with an employee from the City of Vaughan which addresses important aspects of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Lastly, I incorporate my site visits to Markham, Woodbridge Avenue and Vaughan in order to provide my assessment of the built environment of these spaces.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Suburbs

Though there are many competing definitions for the suburb, what remains consistent is their transitional character in different spaces, historical periods as well as their individual cultural aspects. Furthermore suburbs are noticeably fixed in space between the urban city which is frequently built up with high densities, and the rural country which contains larger parcels of agriculture and wilderness (Harris & Lehrer, 2018). More common definitions of the suburb consistently acknowledge them as residential enclaves which are predominantly middle class, consumerist by nature while also diverse. Suburbs are described in other pieces of studies as peripheral in location vis-a-vis a centre, residential and low density (Keil, 2017). This view of suburbanization is consistent in other works of literature as Markus Moos also acknowledges that many view suburbanization as a process in which the citizens, housing dwellings, business, commerce and retailing are spread out beyond the conventional urban areas, which form dispersed landscapes which remain connected to cities through commuting (Moos et al., 2015). Though these definitions are generally accepted, suburbs in reality contain numerous significant functions which stretch beyond their individual set boundaries. As Roger Keil argues, suburbs are products of multiple processes and different modes of governance which occupy worldwide interactions, exchange of capital, idea transmissions as well as different aspirations in a global world. It is for these reasons that suburbs exist as the connecting tissue of rapidly increasing regions which have risen as global players in industrial, commercial and infrastructure activities (Keil, 2018). Furthermore suburbanization has become a major economic sector in many countries as the construction of housing, shopping centres, institutions and places of employment remains crucial for national wealth.

Being home to more than half of the population in North America, suburbs are regarded as places of constant innovation and transformation. Their construction plays a major role in the economy, and their management constitutes a general fixation of local government. While they continue to attract people beginning families they also contain a broad range of household types and ethnic groups (Filion et al., 2000; Frey, 2001). Furthermore suburbs are diverse and dynamic, though in popular culture, they are often accused of generating social anomie,

perpetuating continual repetition, and even of making people fat (Grant, 2009). Suburbs therefore form a central focus of planning activity.

In the Canadian context, developers and builders create the suburbs within a regulatory framework set out by federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Federal laws look after environmental quality, whereas Provinces maintain the authority to regulate planning and to agree to land-use policies that municipalities must pursue. Provinces such as British Columbia and Ontario have approved legislation to manage urban growth, as in previous years by protecting agricultural land and in a more contemporary sense by designating greenbelts and requiring intensification. Planning and land-use controls are synchronized at the regional or municipal level, with zoning meeting the requirements to plan policy. Legislation normally sets out a process that gives planners the tools to assist with execution, therefore preventing anyone from building without a permit that conforms to the plan, zoning, or applicable guidelines (Grant, 2009).

Richard Harris does not highlight a singular factor for working-class suburban development, however does suggest a few key factors which played instrumental roles in the wide expansion of the suburb. These factors are attributed to the strong desire for homeownership, the large availability of cheap land, the possibility of thrift and sweat equity as a substitute for capital, as well as factory decentralization (Fiedler & Addie, 2008). The rise of corporate suburbia really began to take off after World War II where Canada's suburbs gradually started to reflect the much-maligned mass suburbia of popular stereotype. This is largely attributed to new government policies during that time, in particular the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation mortgage financing in addition to the introduction of comprehensive municipal zoning bylaws, as well as the costs associated with the extension of public infrastructure eventually tilted conditions in favor of large-scale developments and corporate builders (Fiedler & Addie, 2008).

With large scale expansions of urban expressways and more accommodating zoning for the use of the automobile urban form shifted from the centralized public transit morphology to a more dispersed pattern heavily reliant on the car, low densities, and a scattering of employment. The conditions which made this urban transition possible include: a phase of prosperity determined by Fordism which took place largely from the end of the second world war to the

early 1970s which resulted in swift urban growth and significant increase in public finances; confidence in governments and as a result in their ability to improve living conditions in cities (Filion, Kramer & Sands, 2016); and extensive desire for the automobile oriented suburban lifestyle. These conditions therefore afforded the supportive financial and political circumstances required for the transition to urban dispersion. Dispersed urbanization and Fordism went hand in hand as dispersion provided the spatial fix for the construction and consumption of Fordist mass-produced goods, while Fordism induced wealth propelled the expansion of this urban form (Harvey, 2001). Recently planning models have been shifting away from sprawl and dispersion and adopting more new urbanism, transit-oriented development and smart growth, making many old suburbs more dense and intensified.

Research for the 1996-2006 period estimated that 66% of all Canadians lived in some type of suburb. This proportion rose to 67.5% by 2016. In 2016, it is found that within metropolitan areas, 86% of the population lived in transit suburbs, auto suburbs, or exurban areas, while only 14% lived in active core neighborhoods. The active cores and transit suburbs grew by 9% and 8%, which is below the national average population growth of 15%. The auto suburbs and the exurban areas increased by 17% and 20%, greater than the national average (Gordon et al., 2018)). The net effect of this trend is that 85% of the CMA population growth from 2006–2016 was in auto suburbs and exurbs. Only 15% of the population growth was in more sustainable active cores and transit suburbs.

Canadian Metropolitan Neighbourhood Population Distribution for 2006 and 2016

	Population in 2006 ^{1,2}		Population in 2016		Population Growth 2006-2016		Share of Population Growth 2006-2016
Active Core	3,107,305	14%	3,372,730	14%	265,425	9%	8%
Transit Suburb	2,707,917	13%	2,923,161	12%	215,244	8%	7%
Auto Suburb	14,100,386	66%	16,523,569	67%	2,423,183	17%	75%
Exurban	1,572,913	7%	1,887,269	8%	314,356	20%	10%
TOTAL CMA^{3,4}	21,506,282	100%	24,724,257	100%	3,217,975	15%	100%

Data source : Statistics Canada, 2016 and 2006 Census Tract data

¹ This chart utilizes classifications from the 2016 Census and moves the population data backward

² Data for 2006 is sourced from the 2016 Census 'T9' classification exercise and are estimations due to census tract splits

³ Lethbridge and Belleville are new CMAs for the 2016 Census but have been omitted from this chart for comparison to previous work

⁴ While all total population figures represent true totals, they are not always a true sum of the Active Core, Transit Suburb, Auto Suburb, and Exurban figures due to 'unclassified' census tracts in several CMAs

Figure 2: Suburban Statistics. Source: (Gordon et al., 2018 pg.12)

The 2006–2016 results illustrate that the populations of Canadian auto-dependent communities are growing to a large extent compared to the national growth rate, which is significant to make a note of when implementing policies guiding public health, transportation, education planning, political decisions, and community design.

Suburban and Urban Lifestyles

Following the Second World War there was a swift expansion of the middle class and a rapid increase in government budgets. This provided abundant affordable housing for the rising middle class, who benefited from the infrastructure assistance of governments which were mainly in the form of expressways and arterials, and its plentiful low density indoor and outdoor spaces were suited to the accumulation of durable goods by households. To explain a rather common day in the suburban lifestyle, Pierre Filion (2015 pg.637) writes a well executed fictional essay.

“Here the person’s first journey is a drive to take her child to school. The school is too far away to walk, a function of bigger schools and the low density of surrounding neighborhoods. She then drives to work, which takes 20 minutes assuming the expressway traffic is moving smoothly. Her office building is in a business park located close to an expressway exit. Occasionally she eats out at lunch time, which requires another drive because choices are extremely limited in the business park, and in any event its car-oriented environment is hostile to pedestrians. She then drives home. That evening she goes shopping at big-box stores located in a power mall. It takes about 15 minutes to get there on the arterial network. Comparison shopping in this retail environment can mean multiple automobile journeys since the most practical way to move from one big-box store to another is nearly always by car (because they are distant from each other and surrounded by parking and arterials). Finally, she ends her day with a film at the multiplex cinema, which is about a 20-minute drive from home.”

Though Filion’s depictions may over exaggerate the use of the automobile, much of his account is very relevant to the North American suburban lifestyle.

As intensification is spreading beyond main cities, it is necessary to explore the living style taking place in such areas. To do so the data which follows has been taken from the City of Toronto Living in the City Survey 2016. The results display that 49% of the people living downtown are between 18 and 34 years old, with 77% of households representing single persons or couples without children. In terms of dwelling characteristics 70% reported living in a

building of 13 or more floors, and 87% reported living in a one or two bedroom unit. When respondents were asked for the reasoning behind living downtown, the most common answers centered around being close to public transit, the ability to walk or cycle everywhere, proximity to their workplace, the safety of their neighborhood, as well as being close to a variety of restaurants, culture, amenities, and entertainment (City of Toronto, 2017).

Sprawl

The boldest attempt to curb sprawl in Ontario was in June of 2005, as the Places to Grow Act became law. This Act mandates the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure to prepare regional growth plans which establish specific density targets and planning priorities which lobby for sustainable urban communities Province-wide. A target of these plans includes the Greater Golden Horseshoe area, where by the year 2015 and each year subsequently 40 percent of all residential development will be required to take place within existing urban areas (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, 2005). Depicted in the map below is the Greenbelt as well as designated growth areas.



Figure 3: The Greenbelt and Growth Areas. Source: Google Images

The Greenbelt Act plays a pivotal role in achieving the broader goals of the Places to Grow and Greater Golden Horseshoe Plan's by protecting approximately 1.8 million acres of environmentally sensitive land. This large scale planning effort is in response to the dramatic population shifts taking place in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, as the area is projected to grow by over 3 million people to 11.5 million by the year 2031, accounting for nearly 80 percent of Ontario's overall population growth during this period. Plans such as this are necessary to direct growth within existing urban areas, as historical suburban development trends would very likely breed further physical expansion which far exceeds the ecological capacity of the region.

Politics of Sprawl

Regional planning attempts to reduce the spread of low-density suburban development in Southern Ontario have previously been in short supply, in both the municipal and provincial levels of government. Keen to draw profitable investment and the tax revenues that come with land development, municipal governments facilitate popular growth trends at the request of developers, who by and large favor relatively inexpensive suburban greenfield development over urban brownfield redevelopment projects (Filion, 2003). This development trend has led to suburban municipalities often being led by local oriented economic interests, where politicians, public officials, developers, bankers, lawyers, and realtors seeking positive returns and high property values, which heavily influences planning institutions and decision making (Leo & Anderson, 2006).

According to Filion (2003) planning authority was returned to municipalities in 1995 with the election of Progressive Conservative Mike Harris as Premier of Ontario. As the Harris government was focused on economic development, the "growth machine" model of land use and municipal competition was restored, combined with a rebate for first time buyers purchasing newly constructed homes in sprawling subdivisions. The conservative government faced a different political climate in their second term as the highly publicized Oak Ridges Moraine conflict between environmentalists and developers made headlines, with allegations of political scandals in terms of handling several development applications which pertained to the Moraine.

The Oak Ridges Moraine dispute is a significant moment as it made the people of Ontario aware of the costs associated with sprawl. As a result this moment served as the foundation for what would be the Places to Grow Act (Eidelman, 2010) as well as adopting smart growth principles which was being emphasized by the new Liberal party lead by Dalton McGuinty. Furthermore continuing with this trend of land protection, the Ontario Greenbelt Plan was introduced soon after.

According to an exit poll following the 2003 provincial election, where Greater Toronto Area citizens were asked to identify “the single most important local problem” facing their community, land development (16.2 percent), traffic (10.9 percent), and transit infrastructure (8.3 percent) were top concerns. By comparison, development was cited by just 2.7 percent of respondents residing within the City of Toronto (Environics Research Group 2003). This notion therefore can be viewed as a turning point where suburban communities previously linked to the conservative party shifted to the liberal party during this time.

Actors in the Intensification of Suburbs

The Province of Ontario plays a huge role as a market enabler in terms of recent suburban densification. Through the Growth Plan and Greenbelt the Province has designated certain growth centre’s which welcome intensification, therefore increased building rights in urban growth centre’s, coupled with the limited number of building land after the introduction of the green belt, has an impact on making densification economically viable, due to the scarcity of buildable land (Touati, Forthcoming). Furthermore this situation allows for the municipalities with greater opportunities of achieving the objectives of the Growth Plan to receive more funding from the Province when viable.

Private actors who aim at expanding economic growth also play a very significant role in the densification process. The municipality’s role is limited to accepting or denying applications for building permits. In some cases, they discuss the type of development in exchange for financial or regulatory benefits with the developer (Touati, Forthcoming). In the actual densification process, the municipality plays a role among others, where private urban development actors, such as developers, real estate agents, design offices, etc., play a more influential role in the evolution of the process.

Smart Growth and Intensification

Smart growth is a development approach which takes various measures to address urban form and transportation issues by limiting outward development, intensifying urban areas, improving public transit systems, and encourage walking. In addition smart growth advocates for social equity, housing affordability, environmental sustainability, as well as the preservation of heritage and natural features.

The Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing uses smart growth as a vision to manage growth in the Province, linked to the principles of a strong economy, strong communities, as well as a clean and healthy environment (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2002).

Directly linked to smart growth, intensification is promoted as a way to achieve several benefits. Firstly, if population increase can be able to be accommodated at higher densities, or within established urban areas, a lesser amount of greenfield land will be vital for new housing. Secondly, research displays that as density increases, automobile use declines in support of transit, walking, and cycling. Lastly, development in existing urbanized areas plays to the city's strengths rather than distributing their resources over an ever-wider territory, as much of the infrastructure and services are already in place (Burchfield, 2014).

A great deal of the literature on downtown revitalization is relatable to a practitioner audience, in the sense that steps are outlined toward repairing or revitalizing downtowns in small and mid-sized cities. Robertson's (2001) eight principles promoting downtown revitalization provide an assortment of options encouraging smaller cities to develop a vision and design guidelines, to establishing public/private partnerships, to capitalizing on downtown's heritage assets to attract visitors. Burayidi's (2015) works advocate for small and mid-sized cities to boost their downtown residential population with the conception of incentives in order to draw new development. This recommendation draws from Burayidi's "en-RICHED" model (2013), which involves thinking past traditional retail revitalization to focus on areas such as, residential development, immigration, cultural amenities, heritage and design. Robertson and Burayidi's recommendations are the suggestion to not focus solely on a single-ticket piece to 'fix' downtowns. Rather this incremental approach to downtown revitalization is consistent with previous research on small and mid-sized cities with the intention of encouraging researchers to

embrace urban diversity (Bell & Jayne, 2009) in seeking to conceptualize broad urban agendas and portray generalizable models, for example relating to epochal urbanism, the structure and nature of the urban hierarchy, global cities and global city-regions and favors a focus on location-specific planning solutions (Filion, 2007). In addition to small scale, uninterrupted improvements research on urban renewal in mid-sized cities also supports the important role of a downtown champion or advocate (Burayidi, 2013; Sands & Reese, 2017) who ensures that downtown issues remain on the municipal agenda.

A great example of smart growth and intensification in Ontario is evident in Guelph. Where despite decades of core area decline and limited private sector investment in downtown Guelph, one distinct take away from their revitalization speaks to the catalytic role that a provincially led, regional scale plan, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario, 2006, 2017), all can play in altering municipal planning and charting a path towards downtown revitalization. The literature displays how a regional planning lens can put forward a broader outlook on land use, environmental protection as well as infrastructure needs than can be achieved by planning within the boundaries of individual municipalities (Jamal, 2018). In this case, the regional growth plan mandated the use of smart growth principles, including dense, mixed-use, transit connected urban form, in the downtowns of Ontario's mid-sized cities within the Greater Golden Horseshoe area. While significant public investments, in the form of a downtown shopping mall, arena and performing arts centre, had occurred in Guelph throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, these investments were not a part of a broader plan focused on downtown revitalization. As such, in isolation, they did little to attract reciprocal private investments. This finding has significance with the small and mid-sized city literature which actively discourages the use of single projects to revamp ailing core areas.

The significance of community engagement is also evident in the local planning process. Through extensive public consultation, or collaborative planning (Jamal, 2018), the creation of a Downtown Secondary Plan and Community Improvement Plans provided a road map for the public and private sector investors, and endorsed a shared understanding as to how and where the municipality would direct growth downtown. This development afforded the opening to engage local stakeholders such as residents, business owners, community groups as well as developers in the downtown planning process, creating a space to share ideas and brainstorm the future of

downtown Guelph. The plans were vetted through multiple audiences, and despite preliminary concerns, are being implemented. Land developers attribute the success of the plan to pro-active community engagement and the creation of a predictable, pre-zoned environment for future development sites.

Opinions of Planners, Municipal Councilors, and Developers

Conventional suburban sprawl has been criticized by planning scholars for some time. As new urbanism and smart growth theories influenced planning in the 1990s and 2000s planners often recommended that increasing household diversity required a larger variety in housing types and mix (Grant, 2009). Where conventional suburbs were criticized as producing identical landscapes of white, middle-class, nuclear families, new communities designed according to urban principles would rely on place diversity to produce social diversity and affordability.

To gain greater insight into the way planning policies and market conditions affect understandings of the relationship between housing types and household needs Jill Grant (2012) interviewed a sample of those involved in planning and building housing in various communities around Canada. The interviewees include planners, municipal councilors, and developers, whom answered questions such as: What are community residents looking for in new suburban areas? To what extent do producers try to accommodate a variety of household types? What are some of the benefits of promoting a mix of housing types?

Planners envision a diverse mix of housing types and other uses incorporated within a relatively fine-grained urban framework in order to create complete communities where inhabitants live, work, and play as well as where public transportation and walking offer feasible alternatives to automobile use (Grant, 2012). Many planners interviewed thought that their communities were making progress in achieving the goals to produce complete communities, however some admitted that the market was not interested in the idea of completely integrating types of housing or types of uses. In the commuter districts of Airdrie and Barrie planners understood that conditions did not yet support the patterns of housing mix taking place in other areas where higher land values imposed compromises. In general, however, planners remain confident that the model towards greater diversity and mix in housing types was not only normative but also a natural process as markets developed and the region became more urbanized.

The municipal councilors put forth much of the same ideals as planners in the sense of creating complete communities. A specific issue one councilor spoke to was dealing with empty nesters, which is a term used to describe parents whose children have grown up and left home. As it is determined people like to age in place the councilor spoke to Surrey, British Columbia and their efforts to build higher density complete communities in smaller towns, therefore making transitions for empty nesters much easier.

Unlike the planners and councilors interviewed, the developers still largely remain in favor of single-detached homes. Their reasoning behind this was that the housing market is fragmented, in the sense that while singles and couples without children are the dominant groups in higher density homes right now, that would not stay the case in 5-10 years assuming they start creating families (Grant,2012).

Chapter 3: York Region Official Plan 2010

Overview

The Regional Municipality of York or more commonly referred to as York Region is located in Southern Ontario, between Lake Simcoe and Toronto. York Region is the upper tier municipality encompassing nine lower tier municipalities which include the Town of Aurora, Town of East Gwillimbury, Town of Georgina, Township of King, City of Markham, Town of Newmarket, Town of Richmond Hill, City of Vaughan, and Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville.



Figure 4: Map of York Region. Source: Google Maps

York Region's nine municipalities currently contain just over one million residents living across approximately 1,700 square kilometres, with 69 percent of those lands located within the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Greenbelt. It is anticipated that by the year 2031 York Region will reach a population of 1.5 million, with 510,000 households in addition to 780,000 jobs (York Region, 2010).

City Building

The focal points for York Region's City building are the Centres and Corridors, which look to foster business, commerce, and cultural activities in the region. The region and local municipalities will support the Centres and Corridors by influencing attractive and compact community design, while also clustering economic activities. The hope for these centres is that the exchange of ideas, and ease of business transactions will promote creativity and influence other economic spin-offs which will solidify these spaces as economic hubs. Listed in York Regions Official Plan 4.2 City Building, it is the policy of Council to (York Region, 2010 pg.65):

- “4.2.1 To recognize Regional Centres and Corridors as hubs of commerce, business and entertainment activities.
- 4.2.2 To recognize Regional Centres and Corridors as the preferred location for major office uses and to develop incentives to attract major office uses to these locations.
- 4.2.3 To encourage the Province and Federal government to provide incentives to attract major office, institutional, educational, cultural and entertainment facilities to Regional Centres and Corridors.
- 4.2.4 To require a mixed-use pedestrian environment in Regional Centres and Corridors that promotes transit use and enhances these areas as destinations for business, entertainment and recreation.
- 4.2.5 That government, educational, institutional, major office, cultural, entertainment and other commercial uses be located and designed to support the Regional Centres and Corridors structure of this Plan.
- 4.2.6 To work with local municipalities to ensure that Regional Centres and Corridors include a significant amount of mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented, and street-related uses including retail.
- 4.2.7 To ensure the efficient movement of goods and services in Regional Centres and Corridors through effective planning, urban design and infrastructure planning.”

The Centres and Corridors in York Region are significant for multiple reasons, with the first being the plan itself as evidence that the Region is placing importance on these spaces as well as providing assistance in their growth. Furthermore these spaces are planned as the most important concentrations of development in the Region which is growing at an exponential pace, meaning the majority of high-rise developments, office spaces, shopping and entertainment will be located

within these centres making them attractive destinations. Lastly this plan is significant for this paper as Markham Centre as well as Vaughan Metropolitan Centre which are discussed heavily in upcoming sections are two of the centres within this plan and connected through the Highway 7 corridor.

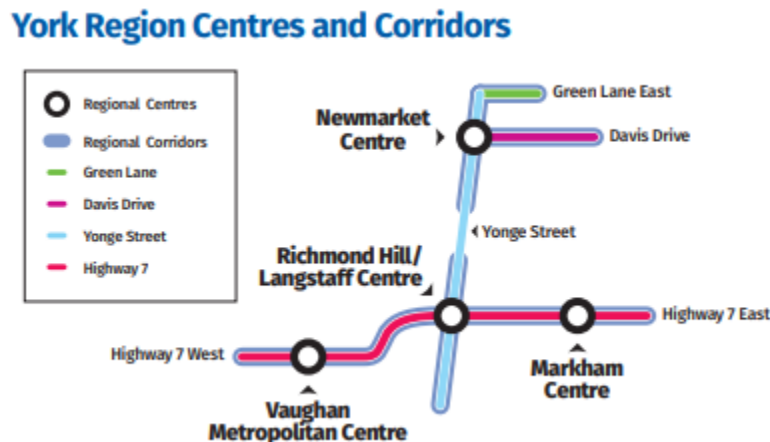


Figure 5: York Region Centres and Corridors Map. Source: York Region Official Plan 2010

Depicted above is the York Region Centres and Corridors map, which include all four centres of Vaughan, Markham, Richmond Hill, and Newmarket. Aside from becoming economic hubs in the region with a high concentration of major office development, these spaces will also incorporate a great deal of high-rise development.

Intensification



Figure 6: York Region Intensification Framework. Source: York Region Official Plan 2010

Depicted above is the intensification matrix framework which distinguishes where high-density developments will take place, with regional centres being the prime focus, followed by corridors and transit stations. In following with the Growth Plan, these spaces will provide a diverse mix of land uses including residential and employment, furthermore they will encompass well designed public open spaces which promote nearby transit, walking, cycling, and a variety of human services.

As the Growth Plan calls for 40 percent of residential development to occur in identified urban areas, the local municipalities must adopt their own intensification strategies based on the regions. In York Region Markham has the highest set intensification target with 31,590 units to be built by the year 2031, Vaughan is the second largest target with 29,300 units, and Richmond Hill is third with 15,300. In these designated urban areas, York Region has specified that the distance to a transit stop must be within 500 metres which is about a five to ten minute walk for 90 percent of the residents, and no more than 200 metres for 50 percent of residents (York Region,2010).

Chapter 4: City of Markham

Context

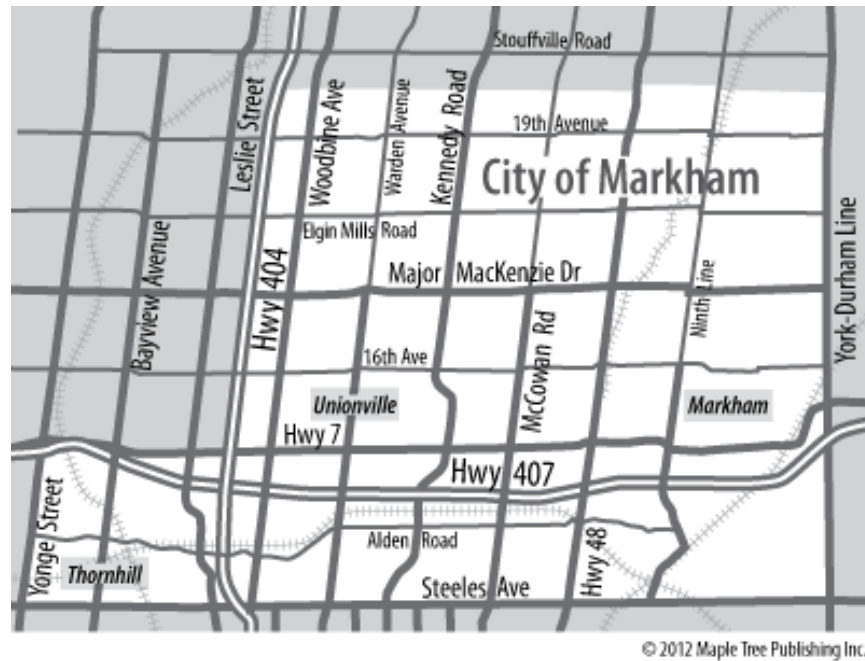


Figure 7: City of Markham Map. Source: Findhometoronto.ca

The City of Markham, depicted in the map above is located in the Regional Municipality of York, and approximately 30km northeast of downtown Toronto. In recent years Markham has experienced rapid growth, while maintaining a wealthy profile, and being a very ethnically diverse place. Markham's population has grown in recent years from a total of approximately 173,000 in 1996, to 208,000 in 2001, and as of the last census had just over 328,000 in 2016 (City of Markham, 2013). In addition to population growth, Markham also serves more than 160,000 workers, which along with population is expected to grow.

Markham's growth is largely attributed to their position in the region, as the City adjoins York Region to the City of Toronto, furthermore Markham is served by highway 404 as well as highway 407, and lastly Markham has transit infrastructure in place with Go Transit, York Region Transit, as well as City of Toronto Transit.

Markham is considered to have a comprehensive Official Plan for the entire municipality, which is updated every five to ten years where local zoning bylaws are required to conform.

Secondary plans in Markham are usually adopted for large areas of land which are typically around 1000 acres, these plans are approved by the municipal staff and council, but are usually drawn up by a multi-disciplinary consulting team retained by the landowners. In the 1990's, Markham diverted to a more sustainable model of development, similar to its historic village origins by planning for new compact, walkable communities such as Cornell, in addition to intensification along major transit corridors and a new transit-based urban core with Markham Centre, to accommodate additional growth.

Markham in Literature

Markham is depicted as having a head start in the field of attempting to improve the environmental quality during suburban development, as the municipality specified lands to restore, protect and reconnect as a result of studies undertaken in the 1990's while expanding their urban growth area (Gordon & Tamminga, 2002). During this time Markham actively encourages higher densities and traditional neighbourhood development, which consists of a mixture of land uses, an active centre, walkable design, and transit options within a compact layout. Furthermore the municipality commissioned a Natural Features Study from leading environmental consultants at early stages of the planning process.

Between the 1960's and 1980's Markham's secondary plans were two dimensional, in the sense that they contained bob diagrams, were solely created by engineering or planning firms, and contained very little, if any urban design content. Secondary plans changed significantly in the 1990's as they contain very detailed urban design policies for streets, public spaces, building types, and environmental design (Gordon & Tamminga, 2002). In some cases landowners have gone even further to set guidelines for built form, building type, and materials. The background studies for the revised plans included an innovative long-range environmental study at a time when this approach was rarely done in Canada, in addition there was also an urban area extension study which considered the gross density and land area to accommodate for the provincial population growth forecasts.

Leadership from both Markham and the Province of Ontario embedded Traditional Neighbourhood Development aspects into many secondary plans. During this time Markham held two preserved farm villages, Markham Village and Unionville Village, which were well known and appreciated by the residents. Due to the changing nature of the plans, the provincial

staff group managing the lands, along with developers and planners held a five day charette in 1992, which was a successful public participation method with over 1000 citizens attending the final meeting (Gordon & Tamminga, 2002). The end result was Markham citizens and politicians living in low density single sue developments at the time, began to accept higher-density and mixed use neighbourhoods as the planning vision of the future.

In exchange for higher densities of development many land owners in Markham implemented traditional neighbourhood design principles, and eventually eleven secondary plans which followed more compact form were approved between 1994 and 1997. These plans were carried out by leading urban designers in Toronto rather than the engineering or land-use planning firms of previous plans, overall the new secondary plans would accommodate for an additional 150,000 citizens, which was about double the existing population. The new approach to suburban development at the time in Markham was planned for gross residential densities of approximately 20 units per hectare, which was 80 percent higher than conventional suburbs nearby (Gordon & Tamminga, 2002). During this period the Markham projects accounted for the largest concentration of plans prepared with traditional neighbourhood design principles in North America.

Diversity in Markham

Diversity has been used as a tool by political leaders for some time for economic development, as teachings by Richard Florida and other scholars have realized that investors find places with a mix of people and activities very attractive. Diversity for planners is used strategically, as a mix of housing types and tenures will allow for a different range of people to live in close proximity to one another. Furthermore this will allow the opportunity for a neighbourhood to be socially and economically diverse, as there would be mixed income, different races, ethnicities, genders, ages, occupations, and households.

Markham's rapid growth over the years has seen the physical outlook of the City become diverse, in the sense that there are various forms of housing types, with nearby amenities, transit options, and services. In terms of population Markham is a little younger than the Canadian median with the average age at 38 compared to all of Canada at 39.5, but a little older than the Toronto Census Metropolitan which is 37.5. Markham is also considered to have a well educated population, as over 56 percent of citizens above the age of 15 have post-secondary education

compared to 48 percent in all of the Greater Toronto Area. Grant's article using data from the 2006 census also mentions that approximately 40 percent of families living in Markham earned over \$100,000 per year with a median income of almost \$75,000, whereas the Toronto Census Metropolitan median income is approximately \$69,000 (Grant & Perrott, 2009). In 2006 over 65 percent of citizens living in Markham identified themselves as members of a visible minority, compared to 1991 where 54 percent of the population was white.

Opinions of Planners, Elected Officials and Developers

To attain the opinions of those who produce these spaces in Markham, Jill Grant and Katherine Perrott conducted semi-structured interviews with planners, elected officials, as well as people in the development industry.

When speaking on mixed or complete communities several planners emphasized the idea that all forms of housing are good housing, as different people have different requirements, by providing multiple options in the same area there are better visual and social effects (Grant & Perrott, 2009). The planners in addition to municipal councillors also acknowledged the built form of new developments in complementing the different cultures in the area, as just by crossing the street one can notice the different types of food and entertainment options.

Though Markham is considered to have achieved a great mix of diversity, planners described a few challenges encountered throughout the process. One hardship was securing mixed units along the block scale or the inclusion of affordable apartment units, furthermore there were difficulties in achieving the desired mix of commercial and residential uses. The planners in this case were required to mandate that developers produce mixed-use developments on the fear that it would not come afterwards, meanwhile developers suggested that mixed uses would possibly come once the residential areas were completely built out. Councillors in this situation acted as mediators, where they acknowledged the need for mixed uses however noted that developers are expected to be more on the business side of things, and that there is natural lag between the completion of units and following retail/commercial uses (Grant & Perrott, 2009). The last challenge mentioned was the clustering of similarities, which can be seen as a negative or positive. Councillors and developers noticed that people are tending to live with others of similar values, class, age, and interests. While some may not look twice at this information, the planners interviewed showed concerns as this clustering could lead to creating a

community unto itself, which may not integrate with the surrounding areas or wider community (Grant & Perrott, 2009).

Overall planners concluded that mixed use was good for new development in any case, whether social diversity was present or not. This is apparent as Markham is constructing a massive community which contains a library, swimming pools, theatres, shops, and many services. Therefore Markham cannot guarantee that they are attracting diversity, however they are allowing for the type of live, work, and play area which they think is important. While the place makers involved hope this will become a diverse place, time will only tell. Planners concluded that the multi-cultural population in addition to the diversified housing stock should translate positively (Grant & Perrott, 2009). This is rationalized as those living in Markham a decade or two ago wanted a single family home with land, whereas many children of these immigrants are leaning toward the apartment life without the lawn. Therefore by having a variety of housing types Markham has the ability to support various lifestyles.

Markham Official Plan

Markham's latest Official Plan (2013) continues to focus on achieving a more urban, sustainable, and complete City. The vision for a complete City would contain all the daily requirements of the residents, meaning access to a mix of jobs, personal services, shopping options, housing, recreation and open space. Markham's Official Plan provides the framework for achieving such goals through land use planning, urban design, transportation, a variety of housing options, employment options, services, community facilities, open space, as well as a road system which promotes cycling and walking. Markham's strategic direction also stipulates six priorities in Building Markham's Future Together, which include managing growth, improving transportation and transit, protecting the natural environment, providing municipal services, providing for recreational and cultural services and facilities while ensuring public safety, as well as celebrating diversity.

Framework for Sustainable Growth

Markham's Official Plan acknowledges that poorly managed growth can lead to urban sprawl, loss of green space, traffic gridlock, and increased costs in relation to infrastructure. With this in mind Markham has focused on smart growth for over 20 years, appropriating growth to their centres and corridors in order to enhance the quality of life for their residents who look to

live, work and play within the City. In order to encourage housing and employment in close proximity, Markham must provide a mix of housing types as well as create designated areas for employment which can provide a wide range of different job types (City of Markham, 2013). To achieve intensification and redevelopment successfully a great deal of emphasis is placed on high quality urban design and sustainable development practices, furthermore in order to gain community acceptance the vision for these areas will contain attractive housing, with activities aligned nearby pedestrian friendly spaces with squares and parks. Markham believes that existing neighbourhoods with lower densities have the opportunity to be connected through small scale infill, while maintaining the character and pattern of these spaces.

Two of Markham's urban growth centres, Markham Centre and the Langstaff Gateway have been the focus for a great deal of intensification which allows for compact development with various forms of living choices, as well as work spaces. Cornell and other new communities will not face the same amount of intensification, however will contain compact, walkable neighbourhoods with mixed-use and employment found along the main streets, while also being connected with parks and open spaces.

Intensification

The York Region Official Plan has Markham set for the highest intensification target in the region at 31,590 residential units between the years of 2006 to 2031, which would meet the minimum target set by the Provincial Growth Plan at 40 percent for Markham at the time. Rather than match the intensification target set by the region, Markham's plan is more aggressive as the City sets to target 60 percent or greater of all residential development before 2031 located within built-up areas (City of Markham, 2013). Majority of this residential development will occur in mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented areas well served by transit, with the result being a variety of housing choices and employment opportunities where people live, making transit, walking and cycling feasible.

Healthy Neighbourhoods and Communities

Housing

Housing remains a significant component to accommodate for growth in Markham, as the predominant family oriented ground-related housing stock which exists cannot support the incoming growth. With Markham evolving into a more urban community, a more balanced

housing stock will be met which will include shared apartments, stacked townhomes, as well as townhouse-dwellings (City of Markham, 2013). Creating more complete communities and neighbourhoods hinges on having a housing stock which can house residents of all ages, incomes, abilities, cultures, and family types. Furthermore the increase of high-rise and mid-rise buildings with different unit sizes will serve an increasing number of small households, which include senior led households, lone parent households, single persons, as well as residents with a preference for rental or shared accommodations.

Urban Design and Sustainable Development

In order to shape the large amount of growth Markham is undergoing, emphasis on urban design will allow for placemaking through the integration of land use as well as built form. Good urban design is a large factor which can contribute to the economic liveliness, health of the community, as well as the acceptance of public spaces. In the built up areas of Markham, urban design will play a key factor in creating compact neighbourhoods with pedestrian friendly streets, compact built form with high quality design, vibrant people places, and sustainable development (City of Markham,2013). Furthermore it also remains important that the greater levels of density and mix of land uses are sensitive to the established residential neighbourhoods, will be transit friendly, and will encourage pedestrian activity.

Transportation

With massive growth in Markham creating different patterns of development and land use, there is an opportunity to support a balance of mobility options, transitioning from a primarily auto dependant community, to one where walking, cycling, and transit are all present. Following current development trends Markham would see as increase of almost 60 percent in daily auto use, therefore to address these trends and shift travel behaviour Markham's plan looks to provide selective road capacity enhancements, increase and upgrade transit services, more transit-supportive development, transportation demand management, and active transportation. Markham will work in cooperation with both York Region and the Province of Ontario to develop a transportation system which effectively accommodates the demand for travel choices in Markham and beyond, with emphasis on pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders (City of Markham, 2013). Furthermore priority will be placed on new intensification areas in the form of transit-supportive development at high densities which are well served by transit, which will

increase opportunities for people to make shorter trips, as well as create better network connectivity, and make people the focus of street activity as opposed to the automobile.

Land Use

Residential

Markham's Official Plan designates planning new residential areas to accommodate a more compact built form which will blend communities for mixed use areas that are transit supportive and pedestrian oriented. Furthermore the intention remains to accommodate for a variety of housing types where residents will be able to live, shop, and enjoy access to a variety of services and entertainment. Residential low rise lands which exist as the majority of the housing stock in Markham will experience minimal change in the future, in some cases infill development will take place in order to provide better access and improve pedestrian experiences to major roads or facilities. Residential mid rise buildings will continue to exist primarily on arterial or major collector roads near mixed use developments. The intent behind these developments are to support transit services by providing modest levels of intensification through various unit types, furthermore these spaces will ensure an appropriate transition to nearby low rise areas (City of Markham,2013). Residential high rise lands will be present along major roads while being characterized by mixed use areas, these spaces will support transit services as well as create a pedestrian scale relationship to the streets and nearby services.

Area and Site Specific Policies

Markham Centre

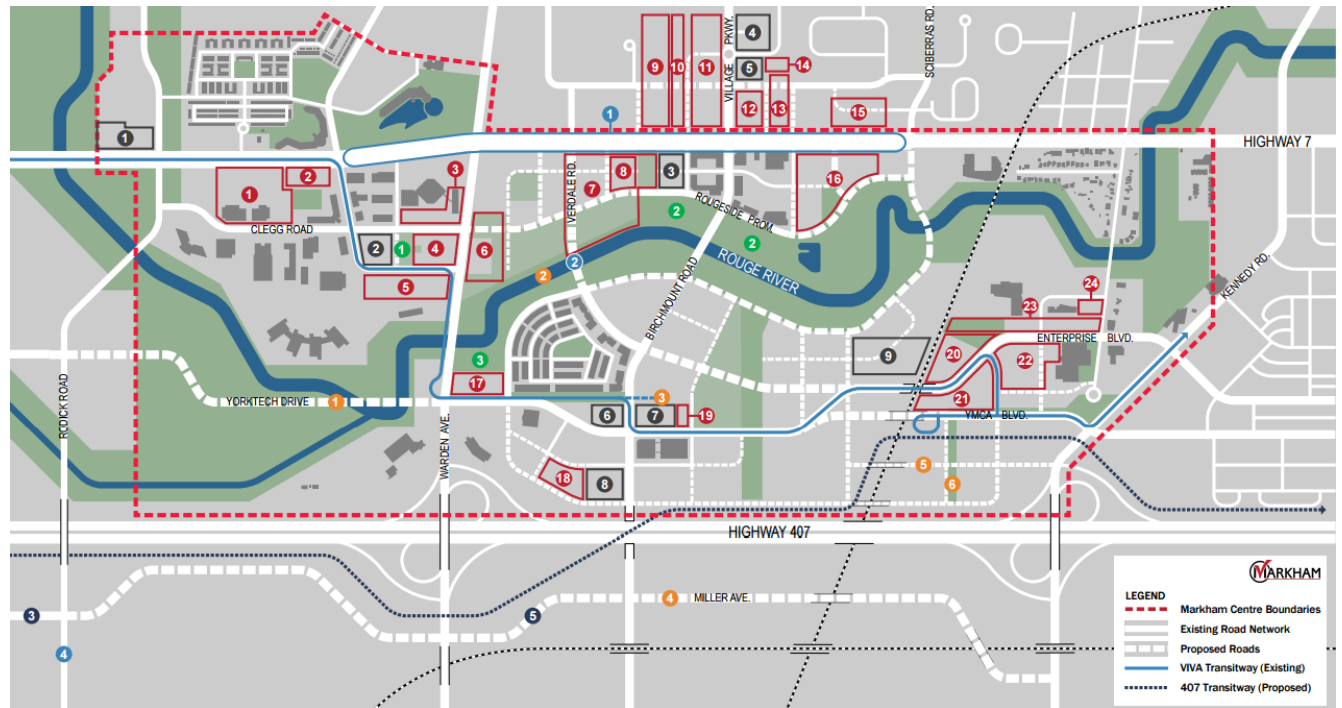


Figure 8: Markham Centre Map. Source: Urban Toronto

Markham Centre which is depicted in the map above is bounded by the Ontario Hydro transmission line and the Rouge River to the west, Highway 7 on the north, Kennedy Road on the east, and Highway 407 on the south. The land use objective for Markham Centre is to provide for a mixed-use regional centre which functions as an urban growth centre, as well as integrates a range of residential, retail, office, and public uses.

Markham Centre Background

Prior to the 1990's Markham Centre was predominantly agricultural with the Rouge River Valley running through the area, and road network being limited to Highway 7 East, Warden Avenue, and Kennedy Road. In 1992 Markham began to vision Markham Centre as an opportunity to create a new downtown which would encompass a mix of residential, employment, commercial, recreational, cultural, and institutional uses based on the principles on New Urbanism. Markham Centre officially established a planning foundation by 1997, where key elements included protecting the environment, supporting public transit, promoting a mixed-use high quality and compact urban form, establishing targets for population and employment, as

well as to provide for a range of parks, public spaces, and community amenities (Arcgis, 2019). Significant development was seen in the early 2000's in the form of offices and residential developments. These include the opening of IMB's software lab, the Motorola office building which is now Worley Parsons Engineering, as well as the construction of a residential building north of Highway 7 and west of Town Centre Blvd. Furthermore transportation infrastructure was put into place with the opening of the Unionville Go Station, Highway 407, and other road improvements. In 2009 the first two significant residential projects were completed at Highway 7 and Town Centre Blvd, with Majestic Court Centre a 16 storey condo with 535 units, as well as EKO Markham Centre, another condominium with four buildings ranging from 9 to 17 storeys and 285 residential units.

In 2006 Markham City Council endorsed a revised Precinct Plan for The Remington Group's Downtown Markham Project. This plan looks to continue the compact urban built form with a mix of residential, commercial, employment, and institutional uses on a built out which is set to last over twenty years. Soon after the adoption of this plan a wide selection of residential and mixed use buildings have been built, as well as other projects which include Bill Crothers Secondary School which specializes in athletics, the Markham YMCA, and Honeywell Building Solutions a global 100 software industrial company (Arcgis,2019). The Downtown Markham plan created by the Remington Group has been very well received and has even won two BILD awards including, the 2012 Places to Grow Community of the Year (visualized) as well as the 2017 Best New Community (built).

In 2010 Markham City Council approved another Precinct Plan submitted by Times Group Corporation. This plan gave way for additional residential and commercial development as soon as 2011, which includes the Uptown Markham development which consists of residential units and nearby stores, as well as increased development west of Warden Avenue. In 2015 the Markham Pan Am Centre opened and was host to a number of events for the Pam Am games, in addition the Origin Complex was completed in the same year consisting of a Cineplex Cinemas, Goodlife Fitness, YSpace, as well as a variety of restaurants, retail stores, and offices.

Markham Centre Site Visits

Unionville

My site visit to Unionville took place on Friday May 17th, the goal of this visit was to witness the implemented changes along Highway 7 in Markham and assess how these spaces were being used.

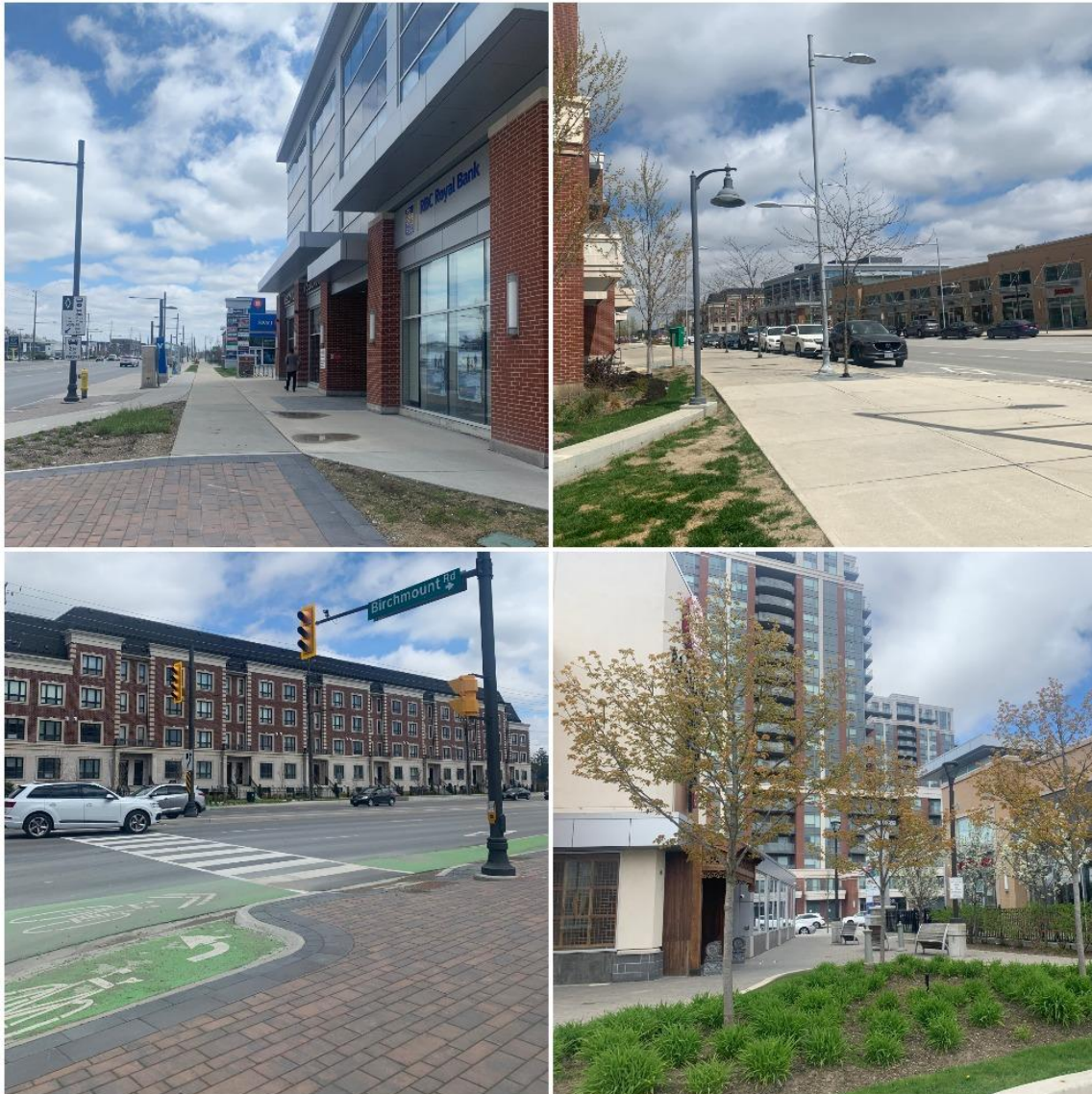


Figure 9: Unionville, Markham Streetscape. Photo's Source: (Pennino, Giancarlo 2019)

I was left very impressed after spending some time in Markham Centre as there is a visible diverse housing stock, wide and walkable streets, bicycle lanes, public transit, many amenities as well as green space. The spaces are also very well connected through a series of

paths, walkways and side streets creating many shortcuts throughout the area. Furthermore what stood out to me the most was that the series of shops and stores in the centre of this area provided entrances on both the parking lot side as well as facing the street. Therefore spending some time on the street I witnessed a good mix of people driving in to use these spaces, as well as people exiting nearby homes and walking across the street for access.

Reading the Markham Official Plan prior to my site visit was very helpful in understanding the aim of the City, which was to foster a complete community for a variety of people. In my opinion the main goals of the plan were achieved as there are a variety of different housing types and densities, as well as a good mix of land uses within the area. Standing in most spots one can see high-rise, mid-rise, townhomes as well as semi-detached homes which all flow with one another. Furthermore the shopping spaces include for a variety of food options, grocery stores, banks, medical centres, etc. Overall my site visit to Unionville was very enjoyable as it captures much of what is iterated in the Official Plan, with more to come I am positive Markham will remain a vibrant City.

Downtown Markham

Located just up the street from Unionville in Markham Centre is the new Downtown Markham site. This site is being created by the Remington Group and has won two BILD awards including, the 2012 Places to Grow Community of the Year (visualized) as well as the 2017 Best New Community (built). As a great deal of construction is still underway in the area it is difficult to get a grasp of everyday life in Downtown Markham. What is noticeable is that many different housing typologies are being built with much higher densities as well as mid-rise and low-rise. The Origin Complex is the most used development in the area thus far as the mall contains a mix of restaurants, stores, offices and amenities right on the main Boulevard where many of the homes reside.



Figure 10: Downtown Markham Streetscape. Photo's Source: (Pennino, Giancarlo 2019)

Though this site is not complete my opinion is that Downtown Markham will foster everything Unionville Markham does on a larger scale as it contains more living spaces, especially with higher densities, closer proximity to both the VIVA rapid way as well as the GO Station, more shopping spaces as well as more amenities which look like they will provide a more exciting nightlife.

Chapter 5: City of Vaughan

Background

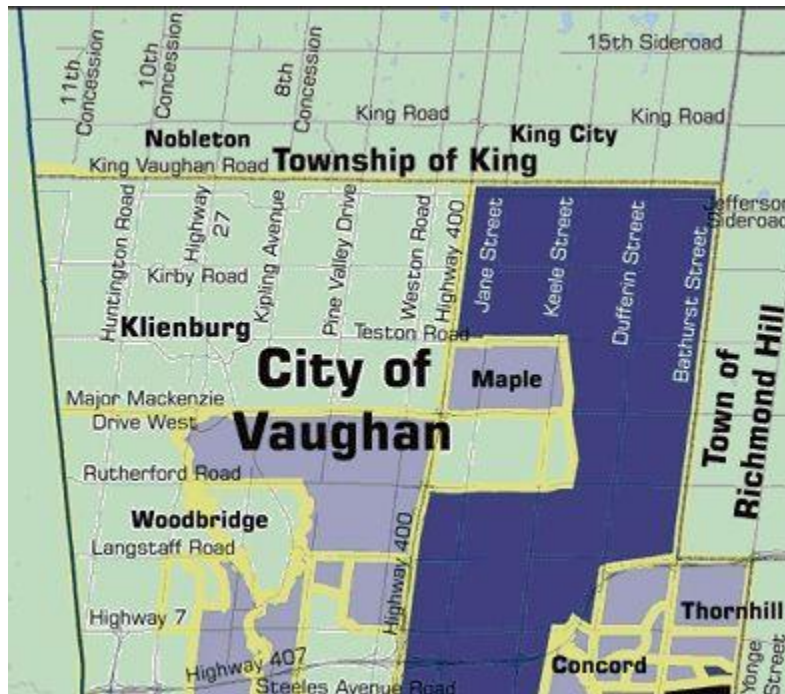


Figure 11: City of Vaughan Map. Source: Google Images

The City of Vaughan, depicted in the map above is located in the Regional Municipality of York sitting just north of Toronto. Vaughan has experienced rapid growth since their incorporation as a City in 1991, as the population grew from just over 100,000 to 249,300 in 2006 and 329,100 in 2016. Growth in Vaughan has transformed a once predominant agricultural area, to a municipality made up of many diverse communities, historic villages, industrial areas and retail centres. The City however is not slowing down, as significant expansion is still to come in the form of emerging mixed-use centres which will include linkages to subways and the Viva bus rapid transit system. This forecasted growth will contain a population of 416,600 and employ 266,100 people by the year 2031.

Vaughan Official Plan

Extensive Engagement Exercise

Prior to Vaughan's future vision for the City, extensive input was sought from the public realm as well as key stakeholders. The public consultation program which ran throughout the Vaughan

Tomorrow process was recognized by the Ontario Professional Planners Institute with an award in 2009 for Excellence in Communications and Public Education.

The initial stages of consultation were in the form of speaker series, where various experts speaking on a number of topics would engage and educate the public on city building. These were followed by visioning workshops, where community members would group together and provide input into the direction the new Official Plan would follow. As the plans would progress summaries of background reports were available to citizens through bulletins in libraries and civic centres, as well as on the web. The Vaughan Tomorrow website was essential for relaying all information, and also provided city growth simulation software which allowed citizens to observe the potential impact on the City (City of Vaughan, 2012). Aside from the general public, constant consultation was held with York Region, various school boards, as well as conservation authorities. The draft Official Plan was completed and released in April of 2010, with open houses running throughout the spring of that year.

The Vision for Transformation: Goals for the Official Plan

The vision for Vaughan's future development as well as goals for the Official Plan are significant as it clearly states what the City plans to accomplish, as well as how it can happen. The goals for the Official Plan are also significant as they are heavily influential throughout the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan, which is analyzed in this paper. Listed below are the goals set forth by the City of Vaughan for the Official Plan (City of Vaughan, 2012 pg.12).

“Goal 1: Strong and Diverse Communities – The Official Plan will look to maintain existing residential communities, while also directing appropriate growth to provide for a wide range of housing choices with community services and amenities.

Goal 2: A Robust and Prominent Countryside – While the City of Vaughan is experiencing a considerable amount of growth, the Official Plan recognizes the importance of protecting natural areas, countryside and watercourses that exist within the City.

Goal 3: A Diverse Economy – While Vaughan has been successful in regards to employment, the future will look toward providing more office uses, research, health and education, compared to the current industrial employment. This will be accomplished by providing employment in mixed-use centres, which would also support transit, walkability, as well as other forms of economic activity.

Goal 4: A Vibrant and Thriving Downtown – The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre has been deemed an urban growth centre by the Province of Ontario, therefore this space will be the focus of activities, businesses, shopping, entertainment and living. The Vaughan

Metropolitan Centre will be the focus of Vaughan's identity going forward, which will be accomplished through planning, design, programming, and investment.

Goal 5: Moving Around without a Car – The Vaughan Official Plan focuses on the importance of walking, cycling and transit use as primary options for getting around, as this will lead to cleaner and more enjoyable streets. These options will become viable through the subway extensions, Viva bus rapid transit expansion, increased Go Transit service, as well as new pedestrian and cycling Master Plans.

Goal 6: Design Excellence and Memorable Places – Vaughan recognizes the amount of assets held within the boundaries of the City, through historic villages, parks, communities and future neighbourhoods. Going forward Vaughan will understand each opportunity held within these areas in order to develop a sense of place while accommodating for growth.

Goal 7: A Green and Sustainable City – The Green Directions Vaughan is embedded into all aspects of the Official Plan, with the main principles being sustainable land-use planning, protection of the natural environment, protecting agricultural lands, communities which minimize energy and water consumption, as well as allowing for multiple transpiration choices.

Goal 8: Directing Growth to Appropriate Locations – The new wave of planning will shift from development of new communities in Greenfield areas, to the promotion of intensification in areas of the City with planned or existing transit service which could accommodate growth.”

The goals of Vaughan's Official Plan are significant for the purpose of this paper as they not only illustrate the City's intentions for growth, however highlight aspects such as providing for more homes, protecting the environment, growing the economy and achieving a downtown, all while achieving these goals appropriately. Therefore while Vaughan is developing a downtown space, their Official Plan goals exist as evidence that these goals are relevant for the whole City and not just in the downtown, showing strong continuity.

Building a Great City

According to the City of Vaughan, building a great city relies on components which work together to create a functional, attractive and sustainable urban fabric. These components exist through the buildings which residents live and work, as well as in the public spaces where people come together.

The public realm is essential in achieving a great city as it consists of various public accessible spaces which residents, employees, and visitors all interact. These elements include everything from sidewalks, parks, and open spaces, as well as smaller touches such as benches, light poles, transit shelters, public art, as well as a sense of identity throughout the public realm.

To achieve such a vision Vaughan is requiring their design to balance multiple roles and functions. This includes accommodating a variety of transportation functions including walking, cycling, and transit and driving, contributing to the greening of the city, as well as emphasising walking by including wide planted boulevards, with complimentary street furniture, art, and lighting (City of Vaughan, 2012). Another important aspect of a good city is to be interconnected, therefore Vaughan is promoting street blocks that are not only walkable, but also maximizing the number of streets connected to arterial roads as well as limiting the amount of dead ends.

Urban design and built form also play a significant role in distinguishing a great city, to achieve such aspirations the city needs a firm set of directions on how development must proceed. Intensification areas in Vaughan will be designed to situate buildings to face a public street with consistent setbacks, mass new buildings to match the existing street while also improving pedestrian experiences, provide for parks and open spaces, as well as contribute to an attractive skyline through architecture and roof design. In intensification areas new developments will need to appropriately situate automobile parking as well as create access to surrounding properties and the public realm (City of Vaughan, 2012). This will be accomplished by using shared service areas within blocks, minimizing the width of driveways and curb cuts across sidewalks, using underground parking where appropriate, as well as prohibiting surface parking between the front face of a building and public sidewalk.

Woodbridge Avenue

Woodbridge is a large suburban district in the City of Vaughan, this area is bound by Major Mackenzie Drive to the north, Highway 400 to the east, Highway 7 to the south and Highway 27 to the west. Though this area is mostly suburban, the historic downtown which runs along Woodbridge Avenue has been the most urban place for a number of years. Woodbridge Avenue, also referred to as Market Lane contains a diverse mix of shops, restaurants, businesses as well as a mixed housing stock which includes low-rise and mid-rise buildings in addition to townhomes. As the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will be underway for some time, Woodbridge Avenue is the greatest contemporary example to speculate as to how a downtown functions in the City of Vaughan. As the two sites are relatively close to one another and overlap in a variety

of ways, it is important not only to observe the planning of Woodbridge Avenue, but to do a site visit as well in order to observe the use of space in the area.

Woodbridge Avenue Streetscape and Design Guidelines

The specific objectives set out in the Streetscape and Design Guidelines include:

- Transforming Woodbridge Avenue into a safe pedestrian-oriented, multi-modal street.
- The creation of a coherent public realm identity which showcases heritage assets and landscape character.
- The provision of public spaces, connections and amenities that enhance daily life and the enjoyment of place.
- The creation of a long term framework to coordinate public realm improvements and capital projects, and to inform future private development along the street.

With the objectives above the City of Vaughan will accomplish an attractive streetscape in this area with many gathering spaces as well as a variety of activities which include social interactions, dining, shopping, festivities, work and play (City of Vaughan, 2017).

Woodbridge Avenue Guiding Principles

As Woodbridge Avenue has existed as a mixed-use, destination oriented space for some time in Vaughan, the guiding principles are significant in order to measure what the City hoped to achieve versus the built reality in this space. Listed below are the guiding principles for Woodbridge Avenue (City of Vaughan, 2017 pg.13).

1. “Become an attractive destination: To make Woodbridge Avenue a lively destination inspiring unstructured recreation for every season. Emphasis will be put on social spaces and shopping destinations which will be accessible through a variety of transportation choices.
2. Create a unified identity: To create a neighbourhood identity which is unified between the streetscape, heritage fabric, public art as well as other interfaces in the area.
3. Establish a public realm for everyone: To ensure that Woodbridge Avenue is inclusive to people of all ages, races, and abilities.
4. Create a comfortable and safe environment: The walkable streets in this area must be safe during all seasons, furthermore appropriate lighting, site lines, seating and traffic calming must be evident.
5. Achieve a high quality design: The materials used in this area must be of high quality and must be sustained in order to provide for a high quality experience.

6. Serve as a key connector: The streets in this area will provide linkages throughout the neighbourhood through squares, trails and paths, therefore creating multiple access points to different spaces.
7. Become a multi-modal street: This would include providing for pedestrian access, bicycle lanes, vehicle travel, as well as public transportation.
8. Foster a complementary relationship between heritage and contemporary: As Woodbridge Avenue is largely a historic neighbourhood, new development should contribute to a healthy relationship with the existing fabric.
9. Be sensitive and respectful of heritage fabric: New developments will also complement the existing heritage by way of architecture, details and colours. Furthermore new developments will draw attention to the heritage areas in different ways.
10. Create a generous public realm and pedestrian environment: The wider sidewalks, new social spaces and linkages should provide the area to be a more inviting and attractive streetscape.
11. Embed sustainability in all aspects of the streetscape: The design process will include low maintenance planting, energy saving materials as well as optimizing maintenance and the operations process.
12. Create a catalyst for economic development, encouraging new business, retail activity and tourism: The streetscape shall promote efficient circulation and accessibility for business which attracts locals as well as tourists.”

The Woodbridge Avenue guiding principles are significant as they remain very similar to those of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Furthermore as this space is largely complete, these guiding principles acted as the pillars of focus during my site visit in order to establish how they were being used throughout the day.

Woodbridge Avenue Site Visit

After reading the objectives and guiding principles for Woodbridge Avenue and noticing some similarities to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan, a site visit was necessary to witness how the spaces were being used upon completion. Though I have been to Woodbridge Avenue countless times throughout my life, I have never visited with the set intention of analyzing how the space works in relation to the guiding principles. Therefore during my site visit I walk through spaces which I am very familiar with, however here I analyze them based on the guidelines set by the City of Vaughan.



Figure 12: Woodbridge Avenue Streetscape 2019. Photo's Source: (Pennino, Giancarlo, 2019)

Depicted above are some photographs taken from my site visit to Woodbridge Avenue which took place on May 15, 2019. The pictures alone depict much of what the guidelines set out, which was to contain a high quality multi-modal street which was pedestrian friendly (bike lanes still underway), while also blending new developments with the older heritage designated buildings. Though there is still a fair bit of construction underway the effects on the street level is hardly noticeable as one can still navigate the area without interruption.

The built form on Woodbridge Avenue largely consists of mid-rise buildings with a good amount being mixed-use, townhomes and a mix of boutique shops, stores and open spaces. The buildings have a good relationship to the street as the set-back is very appropriate allowing for plentiful movement between the streets and buildings. One side of the street accomplishes this to a better degree with an elevated staircase which is connected to the spaces in front and behind the buildings, this allows for pedestrians to access the spaces on both sides of the buildings within a short time frame. The larger parking lots along Woodbridge Avenue which are found behind the main strips of buildings contain similar shops, stores, and restaurants. While these spaces contain large amounts of automobiles, the wide paths in front on the stores as well as proximity to living spaces still make the area very walkable and easy to navigate.

During my site visit I also analyzed the people in the area and on the street in order to observe how they were using the spaces. As it was a sunny day close to the lunch hour there were a good number of people in the streets. What was apparent from the beginning was that though a good amount of people arrived to the area by car in order to go to the grocery store or nearby amenity, it was not uncommon for people to leave the parking lot on foot for reasons other than that purpose which include the cafes along the Avenue, banks, etc. Therefore though some come by car, once they arrive multiple tasks can be accomplished on foot. As for the people living in the area I witnessed a few of the people walking along Woodbridge Avenue with a grocery bag or two enter buildings. Furthermore I noted a few people walking dogs across the area not only along the main street, but in the open spaces as well.

My impression of Woodbridge Avenue is that it functions very well and according to the guiding principles set, all within the small boundaries which contain the area. To me it is very impressive how a space containing one main street and a few arterial roads has managed to form a mixed typology of living spaces, walkable environment, destination type stores, restaurants and shops, as well as many places of service, all while maintaining previous heritage sites.

In my opinion Woodbridge Avenue is evidence that the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will be a successful place as they are aiming toward similar goals being the mixed typology of homes, a walkable area as well as destination spaces. As Woodbridge Avenue has been successful in implementing these plans on a small local scale, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre should not only have similar results, but accomplish them on a much larger scale as they have a

much larger space, will build at higher densities, include major transit hubs as well as provide for more opportunities in employment. What will be interesting to watch over the years as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre progresses is the effect it may have on Woodbridge Avenue. This is relevant as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will be the preferred destination for developments and entertainment of all sorts, therefore meaning that it may take the spotlight off of Woodbridge Avenue in various regards.

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre

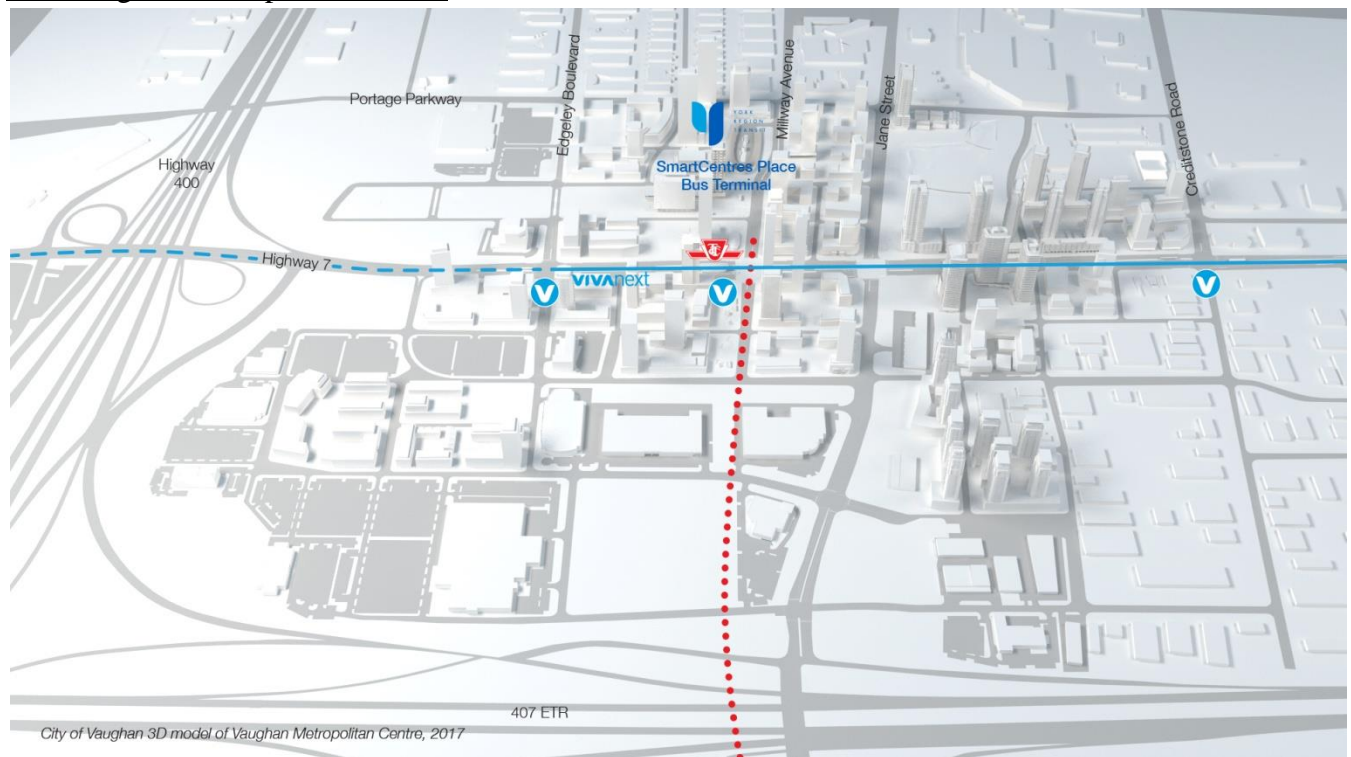


Figure 13: Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Boundaries Map. Source: City of Vaughan 2017

Background

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is bordered by Portage Parkway to the north, Highway 407 to the east and south as well as Highway 400 to the west. The surrounding highways in addition to Highway 7 and Jane Street will provide significant road access as well as visibility to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre depicted in the map above is planned to become the City's downtown, this space will contain high densities among a mix of uses with the intention to become an all-round place where citizens could live, work, and play. As the Vaughan

Metropolitan Centre is a well sized space it will contain multiple development precincts which include residential neighbourhoods, office districts, employment and mixed-use areas. These areas will not exist as singular entities, as they will all be connected through a system of parks, public spaces and squares. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre currently exists as a large opportunity, as majority of the areas have not been developed yet therefore requiring that next steps will include pedestrian friendly and transit oriented development, with a diverse housing and employment stock.

Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan

Vision and Principles

As the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is planned as the future heart of the City, Vaughan has distinguished basic traits of other contemporary city centres as a success model. These spaces consistently contain a wide range of uses and activities, as well as opportunities for employment and living. They can be fully experienced on foot, while also containing learning, shopping, and recreational experiences. These areas are also accessible by transportation, which includes cycling as well as use of the automobile. Lastly these spaces have the highest density and amount of people in the city, while also providing high quality public realms which house a wide range of institutions, as well as places to gather.

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre has described many principles which remain significant for the area going forward. The first of these principles is that it must be transit-oriented, meaning that the highest development densities will be built around the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre subway station, VIVA rapid stations, as well as the regional bus stations. The second principle is that the area will be walkable through a network of streets and pathways which will create short walking distances (City of Vaughan, 2012). The ideology in this sense is that workplaces and amenities will be easily accessible by foot, while interconnected parks and open spaces will make walking in the area a pleasant experience. Aside from being able to move around in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, being accessible to surrounding areas is also a principle. Therefore transit infrastructure and streets will provide easy access in and out of the downtown by many modes of transportation, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will also remain accessible to both Highway 400 and 407, and public parking will be available where necessary to accommodate workers, shoppers, and visitors. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will remain

diverse in many aspects, ranging from a variety of housing types, many different employment opportunities, as well as different types of amenities and experiences. The City of Vaughan also stipulates that the spaces in this area will be vibrant, green, and beautiful through a high standard of architecture and sustainable development.

Objectives

The following objectives for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre have been established as a result of the visioning and principles for the area (City of Vaughan, 2012 pg.19):

- “3.1 – Establish a distinct downtown for Vaughan by 2031 containing a mix of uses, civic attractions and a critical mass of people
- 3.2 - Establish complete neighbourhoods containing a variety of housing
- 3.3 - Attract and accommodate a variety of employment uses
- 3.4 - Attract a major institution of higher learning
- 3.5 - Optimize existing and planned investments in rapid transit
- 3.6 - Establish a hierarchical, fine-grain grid network of streets and pathways linked rationally to the larger road system
- 3.7 - Develop a generous and remarkable open space system
- 3.8 - Make natural features and functions a prominent part of development
- 3.9 - Ensure development incorporates green infrastructure and green building technologies
- 3.10 - Ensure all development exhibits a high quality of urbanity, materials and design”

The objectives set out by the City of Vaughan are meant to achieve a downtown which can meet the density target of 200 people and jobs per hectare, established by the Province of Ontario in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (City of Vaughan, 2012). The heart of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is planned for about 17,000 residents and 6,500 jobs by the year 2031, meanwhile the whole Vaughan Metropolitan Area has a target of 25,000 residents and 11,500 jobs by 2031.

Streets and Transportation

With such a massive influx of people set to move into the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, the issue remains how to effectively manage and reduce traffic within the area. The intent behind many of the transportation policies look to create a many faced transportation system, encourage walking or cycling within the downtown, have direct connections to surrounding streets and

highways, and ensure that the transportation infrastructure flows with the development and design of the area.

As street life will be vital for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, emphasis will be placed on buildings and infrastructure, especially on how to promote walking in and around these areas. Therefore within the downtown there will be pedestrian priority zones which will include the areas around the subway station, VIVA stations, schools, community centres, cultural facilities, parks, as well as places with retail or entertainment clusters (City of Vaughan, 2012). In the pedestrian priority zones the sidewalks will be noticeably larger in size, streets will be designed for slow speeds and on-street parking where necessary, and the streetscape will include pedestrian amenities in addition to wayfinding elements.

With public transit set to become a major anchor for downtown Vaughan, the two major hubs are the Vaughan Metropolitan subway station which is located at Highway 7 and Millway Avenue, as well as the Anchor Mobility Hub which is set to support the regional rapid transit route along Highway 7. The subway station will be significant in supporting the development of high density buildings, mixed use areas, as well as linking directly to the York Region transit system giving citizens many options (City of Vaughan, 2012). The subway station itself is located within an open space, with the entrance being set back to accommodate for high volumes of pedestrians and a large waiting area which contains sheltered bicycle parking facilities. Located on the local streets surrounding the subway will be approximately 40 passenger pick-up and drop-off facilities which have been identified by the Toronto Transit Commission.

Parks and Open Spaces

A great aspect of many cities is parks and open spaces, as stated in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan, “the development of parks and other open spaces will be as important as the development of buildings” (City of Vaughan, 2012). The policies in this section are geared toward allowing for a range of activities and enjoyment to take place within these areas, provide for neighbourhood gathering spots, enhance the image of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, provide for natural features within spaces, as well as enhance paths for pedestrians.

Community Services, Cultural Facilities and Public Art

Though many services will not be available for some time in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, it is crucial that appropriate spaces are identified for future schools, libraries, community centres,

cultural spaces, social services, as well as emergency services. The policies in this section ensure that future residential neighbourhoods will be served by schools, libraries, recreational facilities and emergency services, encourage the integration of many of these spaces within mixed-use buildings, encourage the establishment of a major learning institution of higher learning within the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, as well as allow for public art to be represented within the streetscape and open spaces of the area (City of Vaughan, 2012). Since the establishment of this secondary plan Vaughan has secured a place of higher learning with Niagara University as well as a community centre through YMCA in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

Niagara University of Ontario

The Niagara University of Ontario is an institution which focuses primarily on liberal arts and professional education, while also offering degrees in arts and sciences, business administration, education, as well as hospitality and tourism. Opening in 2019 Niagara University will have a 12,000 square foot building which is attached to the Expo City complex which will hold multiple classrooms, faculty and administrative offices and student lounge areas (City of Vaughan, 2019). The Vaughan location will offer students a bachelor of professional studies in education, as well as a master of science in education programs. The opening of Niagara University in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre marks a huge accomplishment as this will provide a post secondary institution in an urban setting which is walking distance to many homes, businesses, amenities as well as connections to the subway and regional transit.

PricewaterhouseCoopers-YMCA

The PricewaterhouseCoopers-YMCA by Smartcentres opening in early 2020 is a 220,000 square foot, 9 floor mixed use building which contains office space as well as a community centre in the heart of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. The lead office tenant is PricewaterhouseCoopers who will hold 88,000 square feet on 9 floors, the City of Vaughan has 36,000 square feet which will contain a new Vaughan Public Library branch, a performing arts studio, as well as a community kitchen (PwC-YMCA Tower by SmartCentres, n.d.). The YMCA of Greater Toronto holds 77,000 square feet which will contain a pool, fitness area, gym, conditioning room, youth zone, studios, community rooms as well as a range of classes. Furthermore the YMCA will have licensed not-for-profit childcare, with trained and registered early childhood educators implementing a variety of programs.

Land Use, Density and Built Form

The vision behind land use in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will focus on achieving a high density mixed use downtown built around the subway, while also providing neighbourhoods in the outskirts of the core which consist of an array of building types. While achieving this vision the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre must match growth targets set by the Province of Ontario, Regional Municipality of York as well as the City of Vaughan (City of Vaughan, 2012). Aside from density targets and individual spaces, the Vaughan downtown must also manage a proper live-work relationship in the area, and ensure that the built form flows with streets and open spaces while creating a comfortable and active public realm.

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre has 4 land use precincts which break down what will happen where, these areas include the Station Precinct which is mixed-use, the South Precinct which is also mixed-use, the Neighbourhood Precincts which are primarily residential as well as the West Employment and East Employment Precincts which as the name states are primarily employment.

Station Precinct

The Station Precinct will contain a broad mix of uses around the subway station which will largely consist of offices, retail use, as well as both high-rise and mid-rise buildings. This space is meant to be the active core of the downtown space where offices and high-rise buildings benefit enormously from the short distance to the subway station, furthermore there will be a wide selection of retail space for people to enjoy shopping, restaurants and other places of entertainment.

South Precinct

The South Precinct similar to the Station Precinct is deemed mixed-use, while the Station precinct is planned around the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre subway station, the South Precinct will contain Niagara University. Development in this area will see not only high and mid-rise but low-rise buildings as well, furthermore there will also be office and retail use.

Neighbourhood Precincts

The Neighbourhood Precincts in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will primarily be made up of residential uses which will be well served by schools, parks, community centres, multiple facilities as well as retail and commercial as needed.

East and West Employment Precincts

The Employment Precincts will include office employment as well as non-noxious employment uses, these will range from corporate, professional and government offices to research and development facilities, light industrial uses, as well as hotels and conference facilities. In addition these precincts will include retail, restaurants, places of entertainment and personal businesses. The building structures within these spaces will be a mix of low-rise, mid-rise and high-rise buildings.

Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Site Visit

Though the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is still in the very early stages of development, my site visit looked to view the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre subway station to witness its usage and how people were arriving there.



Figure 14: Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Station – Aerial View and Street level. Photo's Source: Aerial View, Google Images. Street Level, (Pennino, Giancarlo 2019)

Though I take this subway often, the vast majority of my trips in the past have been either the start or end of the day. Early mornings or rush hour evenings display very similar aspects, as the majority of people park their vehicles in the surrounding lots and use the subway to get to school or work. The middle of day experience was planned to witness how people were using this space in a non-rush hour setting. What was apparent to me during the lunch hour visit was that arrivals and departures from the subway were primarily people getting on different buses

and car drop-off areas, with some people using their bicycles. Whereas in the mornings the vast majority of people are going to use the subway to go southbound, my day visit saw that this is largely the case throughout the day, there were also a considerable amount of people getting off of the subway in order to use the regional transit. The area surrounding the subway also provided wide sidewalks, places to sit as well as bicycle parking, which were all being used to some degree.

My overall impression of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Station is that it is placed very well within the boundaries of the area with the proper built form and streetscape to support a wide range of people. Existing at a very early stage within the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre this station is in frequent use, therefore with much more development on the way this station will continue to be a catalyst for the downtown.

Interview: City of Vaughan – Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Vision

As the location of my main research is the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, speaking with an individual working for the City of Vaughan was essential in allowing me to understand the profession in the City, how this plan came about, how the public was consulted, issues and challenges, how they believe this site will flourish as well as various questions which I cannot answer through literature or the plans.

On May 29th, 2019 I sat down with an Urban Designer from the City of Vaughan who was on the team for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. The goal of this interview was to gain the perspective of an employee from the City of Vaughan on topics such as intensification, complete communities, different aspects of the plans, their view of the process as well as the vision for the space going forward. The contents of my semi-structured interview are depicted below:

The planning profession in Vaughan and how it has changed

The nature of the planning profession in Vaughan has changed due to growth, therefore the transition has focused to large redevelopment projects. This means that there is more developments regarding mixed-use and higher densities, therefore the City needs new resources to complete these types of projects which are new to Vaughan.

The shift from the conventional suburb to a more mixed landscape with higher densities

The structure of the Official plan looks to allocate the highest heights and densities to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre as well as other growth nodes. Therefore following the new model the City is trying to guide these developments to the downtown. This shift has lead to an abundance of development applications which the City has never seen before with many of them far exceeding the 35 storey limit set by the plans. Overall there is a lot of growth happening with intensification in a few key areas, therefore the City is trying to guide development appropriately while maintaining good planning principles based on existing policies.

How a plan such as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan is produced

The process for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan stemmed just after the Vaughan Official Plan was created and the space was allocated for the downtown. Therefore directions from the Vaughan Official Plan as well as other plans such as transportation plans, service plans, urban design guidelines, streetscape plans, community improvement plans as well as park plans all lead to the conceptualized downtown.

What models were used in the visioning process

Without naming places specifically, multiple precedents of urban downtowns from Canada, North America and around the world were used. Themes used in searches include great urban spaces, active centres and vibrant landscapes in order to inspire the visioning.

Relationships with the private sector

There is a very active development community dealing with the downtown, with experienced developers who own large parcels of land in the area as well as others with smaller parcels who are not very experienced in the field. The City has created a landowner working group platform, with meeting held throughout the year which allows for ideas to be discussed around the table. This creates great opportunities for feedback in an organized manner. Many development applications will have design meetings upfront, which helps determine priorities and policies align before applications are formal.

Mixed communities in general, how it can happen in Vaughan

Overall trying to create a network of mixed uses, with the hot topic being the guidance of retail and office use. When retail is not viable from a market perspective the City can retrofit ground floors to bring retail in over time. In terms of office use which comes at a slower pace, the community improvement plan provides incentives when necessary in order to provide mixed-uses.

Importance of attracting a transit hub and subway to Vaughan

The transit hub and subway have not only been critical for this area, but have been the catalyst for everything occurring in the downtown. They also remain fundamental for where development has and will go, as desire to be close to these spaces are high. Though it is early ridership is higher than expected with approximately 20,000 people moving through this space per day.

Other important aspects

The public realm was named as another key aspect for the success of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Emphasis is being placed on achieving high quality streetscapes and public spaces in order to create seamless connections between every space in the area.

How the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will integrate with the rest of Vaughan

The hope is that the citizens of Vaughan will think of this space as the heart of the City. While there are existing neighbourhoods and cores of each individual neighbourhood, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will be a destination for each of these neighbourhoods to flock to in order to experience possible workplaces, the different public spaces, restaurants and an abundance of experiences.

Challenges in the process

One significant challenge was to raise awareness to the public as it was realized many people did not understand the vision or scale to the development which is happening. Though there was countless public engagement sessions prior to the current construction many citizens are realizing the changes at this moment due to the cranes in the sky. This is largely due to the fact that the downtown site does not exist within a contemporary neighbourhood where citizens feel a sort of attachment.

Another challenge exists as these large urban projects are new to Vaughan, therefore issues relating to financing, staging, the planning of public services as well as meeting targets set by the plans must all be achieved.

The overall vision for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre

The goal is to make Vaughan the place to be, meaning this will hopefully be a downtown on a scale which no one understands. The vision is to have very animated streetscapes with public art, urban amenities, beautiful architecture and great public spaces which all contribute to generating a lot of interest and draws a lot of people.

This interview added to my overall awareness of the amount of hard work and focus put into the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre by various City employees as well as private actors. What was equally impressive was that the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is larger than just the secondary plan in a way, as almost every subsidiary plan for the City of Vaughan was used in the conceptualization of the downtown. Furthermore the consistent involvement of the private sector through the landowner working group platform ensures that conversations regarding what happens within the downtown boundaries not only remain open but will provide more opportunities for everyone involved. Lastly the success of the subway station as well as attention of detail to the public realm makes a very convincing argument that the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will be a thriving area in a short period of time, this is evident as the station is already in higher use than projected with the streetscape around it looking very attractive, meaning that as developments continue to be completed usage will continue to escalate.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

As development trends have shifted in recent years, this paper has analyzed how suburbanization manifested in North America, the factors which led to adopting smart growth policies and the changes in urban planning, an overview of the York Region Official Plan, a case study on Markham Centre as an example of having good planning principles as well as an analyses of the plans for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and determining what this space can be capable of. Depicted below are the questions asked in the introduction of this paper, combined with the findings through analyzed literature, policy, semi-structured interview as well as site visits:

Will the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre be a place for the residents of Vaughan (similar to Woodbridge Avenue which is regarded as the contemporary unofficial downtown or on a greater scale)? Or will it be a unique place of its own?

This paper has shown that the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is likely to become a unique place of its own, while at the same time act as a destination spot for people living throughout Vaughan and even beyond. Seeing as how there are multiple neighborhoods being formed within the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre in the form of the Station Precinct, South Precinct, Neighborhood Precincts as well as East and West Employment Precincts, leads to the conclusion that this area will contain a mix of uses which is unrecognizable in Vaughan's current landscape. Whereas Woodbridge Avenue is regarded as a destination for many Vaughan residents, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will have the resources to provide housing, employment, entertainment and services on a much larger scale than any other neighborhood present in Vaughan and will more likely than not become the more popular destination in the coming years.

Is this plan appropriate for the City of Vaughan? What opportunities does it allow? What obstacles must be overcome?

The question as to whether this plan is appropriate or not stems from the fact that Vaughan for the most part follows traditional neighborhood development, whereas the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre seeks to create a much more dense and vibrant space. This plan is appropriate for becoming a Downtown for Vaughan as Marcy Burchfield (2014) concludes that as density increases, transit use, walking and cycling all increase simultaneously while automobile use

declines. Therefore while the City of Vaughan is providing higher densities in this space in terms of residential and office buildings, with walkable streets and transit options, the opportunity exists to become a vibrant downtown where residents can live, work and play with the only obstacle left to be overcome is integration with the rest of Vaughan. Furthermore the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan is appropriate for the City of Vaughan as multiple supplementary plans were considered during the visioning process, meaning that the goals of transportation plans, service plans, urban design guidelines, community improvement plans as well as park plans are all consistent between the Downtown and overall City as discussed in my interview with the City of Vaughan.

Will it work as a centre where people can live, work, play, and have access to various forms of amenities and entertainment? Or will this development be a place where people simply live while using transportation means provided to get to Toronto?

As many municipalities around Ontario are attempting to create complete communities, Jill Grant (2012) interviewed various planners across Canada that envision a diverse housing mix with other incorporated uses as the natural process for a region to become more urbanized. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan ensures that there will be allocated spaces to live, work and play as different precincts will contain different functions. This ensures that certain areas will consistently contain places of entertainment and amenities while others will have various housing forms as well as appropriate services.

What evidently works in Markham which can be envisioned for Vaughan's future?

Markham is a significant example when visioning the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre as it not only exists in the same region as Vaughan, however also shares Highway 7 which is the main Corridor feeding both Centres. Jill Grant and Katherine Perrott (2009) highlight mixed use as a strong element of Markham's built form, where the communities containing a library, swimming pools, theatres, shops and many services provided the opportunity for residents to live, work and play. Along the Highway 7 Corridor Markham currently contains a mix of housing typologies and densities, transit options in the form of walking, cycling in addition to public transit, parks and open spaces as well as many amenities and services. As the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre

shares this same Corridor, Markham's success along Highway 7 remains very relevant as evidence of what works.

Who are the actors involved in this project and what models do they use? Furthermore what aspirations do they have?

As Anastasia Touati (Forthcoming) illustrates the Province of Ontario has been the catalyst of recent suburban densification through the Growth Plan as well as the Greenbelt Act, which provides municipalities the opportunity to receive funding from the Province in order to achieve specific goals at times. In the case of Vaughan, York Region which is the upper-tiered municipality exists as an influential actor as their Centres and Corridors Plan seeks to influence development into the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre as well as Highway 7 which is the Corridor which runs through the space. Lastly the City of Vaughan as well as the private sector share the similar goal of making the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre a vibrant downtown which draws many people, contains various amenities and public spaces, all while generating a lot of interest. This goal remains plausible as the City of Vaughan has created a landowner working group platform, where consistent meetings are held with various actors share thoughts in the same space ensuring development applications remain consistent.

I believe the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will become a thriving downtown which will provide people with different places of living, employment, transit options as well as a diverse range of activities just as the plans aspire to do. The City of Markham which is also located in York Region and along Highway 7 has accomplished many of these goals, and currently contains neighbourhoods with mixed housing typologies and densities, with viable transit options, amenities, entertainment and services. A second factor which leads me to believe this area will be very successful is the breakdown of the precincts which include the Station Precinct, South Precinct, Neighbourhood Precinct as well as East and West Employment Precincts. In my opinion each of these precincts will contain the right uses which will contribute to the success of the downtown. For the Station Precinct the subway station is a huge factor for the area, and the City is taking the right steps by surrounding the station with a mix of residences, offices, shopping spaces, restaurants as well as other forms of entertainment. The South Precinct which is located steps away is planned appropriately in my opinion as they have secured a space for Niagara University as well as more office and retail space. The Neighbourhood Precincts also

looks appropriate for this space as aside from all the planned residential spaces, there is also space allocated for schools, parks, community centres as well as multiple facilities. Lastly the East and West Employment Precincts ensure that there are a variety of employment types which will include corporate, professional, government as well as light industrial. Lastly I believe having a landowner working group platform will be great for the development of the downtown as every decision is being made together with City workers who know what the area needs with the assistance of experienced developers and consultants openly working together. Overall the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre has created a secondary plan and gathered the resources to build a great downtown which in my mind will be home to many citizens, who will be able to work, live and play in this great space.

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